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ABSTRACT

In 1979, humanities faculty at Reading Area Community College introduced the writing sample as the means of placing entering freshmen into appropriate writing classes. In response to expressed concern about the objectivity and validity of the writing sample approach, the humanities faculty engaged in a 6-year effort to adjust the writing sample model in an attempt to improve the validity and reliability of writing sample placement results. The first part of this project involved five phases: (1) compiling placement test evaluation data; (2) comparing internal grading criteria used by individual faculty evaluators; (3) establishing relationships between evaluator placement criteria with entrance requirements used for higher-level composition courses; (4) identifying and minimizing evaluator problems and sensitivities; and (5) soliciting suggestions for improving the writing sample procedures. During the second part of the project, a profile of students with borderline writing samples was developed in order to investigate the descriptive, academic characteristics shared by these students; to monitor their success in writing classes; to assess their performance in college programs; and to reveal factors affecting student retention among this group. Appendices include instructions for writing sample evaluators, checklists for placement criteria, and interview questions used to solicit evaluator's internal criteria. (EJV)

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TITLE III
CURRICULUM ENRICHMENT ACTIVITY
FACULTY DEVELOPMENT
PROJECT REPORT

Assessing and Improving Writing Placement Sample Validity

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PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT PROGRAM

READING AREA COMMUNITY COLLEGE

SEPTEMBER, 1985

JC 850 496

THE READING AREA COMMUNITY COLLEGE
FACULTY DEVELOPMENT PROJECT FINAL REPORT

Assessing and Improving Writing Placement Sample Validity

Conducted
by
Judith A. Schum, Associate Professor of English
Division of Humanities

Submitted for Use
by the College Community
on
September 12, 1985

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was provided through a Strengthening Program Grant
(Title III of the Higher Education Act of 1965)

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PART A: ASSESSING AND IMPROVING THE VALIDITY OF THE WRITING PLACEMENT TEST MEASUREMENT

1. Background of the Project

In 1979 the Humanities faculty at Reading Area Community College (RACC) tried to eliminate the objective measurement of writing that multiple choice questions provide by introducing a writing sample as the means of placing incoming freshman into appropriate level writing classes. Initially ignorant about the demands, problems, and approaches to use in evaluating placement writing samples, RACC faculty members were not unique. Like so many other English instructors, they found that the apparently simple and individual concept of evaluating essays, a task they had performed daily for many years, had evolved into a sophisticated interactive process. As course levels changed, well-intentioned outsiders demanded multiple and "better" questions, and numerous colleagues questioned the objectivity and validity of the writing sample. RACC Humanities division members (these are the only faculty members responsible for evaluating the writing placement samples) responded by engaging in a six year effort to adjust the writing sample model in an effort to improve the validity (i.e., the test measures what it professes to measure) and reliability (i.e., the test results can be consistently achieved under a similar set of circumstances) of writing sample placement results.

A general impression model (defined by Diederich in 1974 as "giving a single grade or score to each essay rather than a number of ratings on various qualities") was selected for the writing sample evaluations, with two score indications possible for each essay. After reading a writing sample, an evaluator indicated placement in either English Composition (HU

121) or Developmental Writing (HU 101) and then passed the paper to a colleague for a second reading. In a high number of cases faculty members seemed to agree. Sometimes, however, the two faculty readers disagreed; when this occurred, the paper was referred to a third reader for a final evaluation.

2. Proposed Project Goals

Having the sense that a test was working or that readers seemed to agree was quite different from documenting the intuition. Consequently, an overdue mini-assessment of the RACC placement test procedure was begin in October 1984; the focus of the evaluation was assessing and improving the validity (and indirectly, the reliability) of writing placement tests. The proposed evaluation had five strands: the first involved a compilation of data comparing consistency of two-reader placements with three-reader placements by the RACC evaluators; the second sought to compare internal criteria used for evaluation by each faculty evaluator; the third attempted to establish relationships between the internal criteria used by Humanities division personnel when making assessments with the entrance requirements for the higher level composition course; the fourth tried to identify perceived problems and sensitivities of the readers; the fifth solicited suggestions from the test evaluators to improve the RACC writing sample evaluation system. While the five goals of the evaluation were not pursued in a specific order, they were undertaken between October 1984 and August 1985.

3. Project Scope and Research Methodology

The procedure for accumulating data began with the selection of the 1983-1984 academic year as the source from which to draw writing samples for the study. This particular time frame was selected because it

represented a term following a change in the level of the Developmental Writing course (HU 101). Once the source of the data was identified, the multi-faceted procedure began.

First, 120 placement tests from the 1983-1984 school year were randomly selected and placed into stacks representing two-reader and three-reader evaluations. In this sample 50 essays were in the three-reader evaluations. Of the original 50 essays, seven contained incomplete or invalid student information and could not be used, bringing the final number of three-reader essays to 43. The two-reader number was also randomly reduced to 43, leaving 86 papers in the final sample used for the first strand of the research.

Once the 86 writing samples were gathered, they were given identification codes, typed (with the same spelling, punctuation, and mechanics of the handwritten versions), duplicated (so that each member of the Humanities Division could receive a typed copy of every writing sample), and randomly assembled into packets. In this first segment of the project, faculty members were given collated stacks of writing samples, representing half of the 86 essays used for the project, instruction sheets (See Appendix A.), and color-coded pens. Evaluators were sent individually to perform the tasks indicated in their packets. Within each packet evaluators were asked sometimes to rank papers, frequently to use checklists to indicate reasons for their placements (See Appendix B.), and most often to indicate whether placement essays were composition (HU 121) level or developmental level (HU 101). The time taken for faculty members to complete their tasks ranged from 70 to 90 minutes.

One month later the system was repeated. For this assessment the ranking was eliminated because it provided little information for the study

and lacked the training and anchor papers of holistic testing to provide significant and reliable results (Myers 1980). Moreover, the checklist was replaced by lined response sheets (See Appendix C.), which encouraged evaluators to respond in an open-ended manner to questions about their placement decisions. (This adjustment was made in response to written suggestions made by faculty members when completing the first part of the evaluation study.) Most of the papers again required that evaluators indicate whether the essays were composition (HU 121) level or developmental (HU 101) level. Included in each packet were the remaining half of the 86 essays not yet responded to by several of the evaluators. (In the first grouping of tests, all papers were distributed to the readers, but all readers evaluated no more than one-half of the papers.)

Following the second evaluation of placement essays by all project participants, individual interviews were conducted with Humanities division personnel. Each taped interview lasted approximately 90 minutes. (See Appendix D for interview questions.)

4. Phase One: Compiling Placement Test Evaluation Data

Two-Reader Essays

As a result of the responses given by the five faculty members to the 86 student placement essays in the project, certain strengths and trends can be identified for this evaluation team. Among the original two-reader papers (despite the small number of tests which provided less significant percentages than one might prefer), a strong sense of the differences between composition (HU 121) and developmental (HU 101) level writing emerges. (See Appendix E for two-reader response data.) In the 43 original two-reader tests, randomly interspersed among three-reader essays in each of the evaluation packets given to project participants, faculty

members unanimously agreed on placement for 79.1 percent of the papers. In the nine tests, representing the remaining 21.9 percent of the sample, one evaluator disagreed with the course placement of the other four respondents. In evaluating the 43 two-reader writing samples of this project, Humanities faculty members labeled 47.1 percent of the papers as composition (HU 121) level and 53.9 percent as developmental (HU 101) level.

Within the two-reader test samples, the nine times in which faculty members differed from their colleagues are presented in terms of percentage and number in Table 1-1 below.

Table 1-1
Individual Evaluator Differences From Group Consensus on Two-Reader Writing Samples in this Project

EVALUATOR*	1	2	3	4	5
Percentage of single differences from group	2.3	4.7	9.3	2.3	2.3
Number of single differences from group	1	2	4	1	1

*Each evaluator has an assigned number which remains consistent throughout this report.

The obvious agreement among writing sample evaluators, with four evaluators disagreeing under 5 percent of the time and, more significantly, with three individuals disagreeing with their colleagues a single time, is only part of the consistency exhibited by the participants in this study. Comparing test scores given by the evaluators during this study with the

original test scores given by these individuals to the same student papers (See Table 1-2 below.) provides additional evidence of consistency by these instructors for the two-reader essays.

Table 1-2

Individual Differences from Original Scores Assigned on Two-Reader Placement Essays in this Project

EVALUATOR	1	2	3	4	5
By percentage disagreement from original	4.3	5.9	---	3.3	8.3
By number disagreement from original	1	1	--	1	1

The difference in percentages in the first line of Table 1-2 is explained by comparing the numbers and percentages of the two-reader tests in the study that were originally scored by each evaluator. This comparison, by both percentage and number, appears in Table 1-3 below.

Table 1-3

Individual Changes on Two-Reader Essays in this Project Originally Scored by Group Evaluators

EVALUATOR	1	2	3	4	5
Percentage of two-reader essays from study originally scored	53.5	39.2	9.3	69.8	**27.9**
Number of two-reader essays from study originally scored	23	17	4	30	12

The percentage of project placement tests originally read by the individual evaluators helps to place the higher percentage for evaluator 5 (in Table 1-2) into perspective. With only twelve of the study placement samples originally read by this evaluator, the change in 1 out of 12 scores appears more significant than it might be with a larger number of writing samples.

Three-Reader Essays

In the 43 three-reader papers, agreement and consistency became more difficult for the participants in the placement test study. (See Appendix F for three-reader response data.) In the sample of three-reader essays, only 40 percent of the writing tests earned unanimous placement scores by the evaluators. In that 40 percent sample, 12.7 percent of the essays were composition (HU 121) level and 87.2 percent were developmental (HU 101) level.

Of the 60 percent of the three-reader placement tests on which the evaluators did not agree, 58.3 percent of the papers had one or two readers who thought the essay was better than the developmental (HU 101) designation it received by the rest of the respondents. Of that 58.3 percent of the essays, 43 percent had one evaluator who differed from the group designation while 57 percent had two evaluators who placed the essay above the group decision.

In the remaining 41.7 percent of the essays for which there was no agreement, one or two readers placed the essays below the composition (HU 121) designation of the group. These lowered essays were evenly divided among one and two respondents who disagreed with the group placement decision.

Profiles of individual evaluators are contained in Tables 1-4 and 1-5 which show trends on the scoring among the project participants.

Table 1-4

Individual Evaluator Agreement with Group Consensus For Three-Reader Essays in this Project (by Placement Levels)

EVALUATOR	1	2	3*	4	5
Overall percentage agreement with overall group scoring consensus	63.6	56.7	83.4	74.2	71.4
Percentage agreement with group on composition level essays	61.9	58.8	20.0	39.1	40.0
Percentage agreement with group on development level essays	38.1	41.2	80.0	60.9	60.0

Table 1-5

Individual Evaluator Disagreement with Group Consensus for Three-Reader Essays in this Project (by Placement Levels)

EVALUATOR	1	2	3	4	5
Overall percentage disagreement with overall group scoring consensus	36.4	43.3	16.6	25.8	28.6
Percentage disagreement with group on composition level essays	41.7	92.3	---	62.5	25.0
Perentage disagreement with group on developmental level essays	58.3	7.6	100	37.5	75.0

Realizing that the small number (43) of three-reader essays used for this project cannot provide individually significant percentages is important in interpreting this data on non-agreement. With 26 papers represented by the non-agreement percentages, only trends can be examined. The trend for tnis placement test evaluation team shows a lack of consistency for these identified borderline writing students. As significant as the differences among the evaluators for this project are the differences between the original placement scores assigned to theses essays by specific faculty members and the second placement scores assigned by the same (individual) faculty evaluators during this project. The individual changes from the original placement designations for essays used in this project appear in Table 1-6 below.

Table 1-6

Individual Differences From Original Scores Assigned on Three-Reader Placement Essays in this Project

EVALUATOR	1	2	3	4	5
Percentage change made from original scores	41.8	50.0	33*	22.9	25.0

* Evaluator 3 scored only 3 of the original placement essays. In other words, if placement for 31 percent of the students were made as a result of the group consensus in this study, these individuals would have been placed in different level writing classes. A final breakdown of the individual evaluator changes between original placement and second placement of students into specific classes is reflected in Table 1-7 below.

Even among the samples on which the evaluators unanimously agreed during the three-reader segment of this research, only 69 percent of the essay designations agreed with the original.

Table 1-7

Individual Differences From Original Scores Assigned on Three-Reader Placement Essays in this Project (by Placement Level)

EVALUATOR	1	2	3	4	5
Percentage of original composition level placements changed in second reading	27.8	63.2	---	35.7	20.0
Percentage of developmental level essays changed in second readings	46.7	12.5	20.0	21.4	66.7

The figures in Table 1-7 indicate that in a second reading of the placement essays randomly selected for this project, five evaluators lowered an average of 36.7 percent of the originally-placed composition level papers and raised an average of 41.8 percent of the originally-scored developmental essays. Compared to 4.4 percent average difference between first and second scorings of two-reader essays, the high percentages indicated in Table 1-7 quantify a suspected problem by members of the Humanities division for these identified borderline placement essays.

5. Phase Two: Comparing Individual Grading Criteria

To improve the consistency of placement of two-reader essays and to decrease difficulties in placing essays falling between composition and developmental levels became the second phase of this project. Aimed at articulating and collating internal grading criteria used by the RACC placement essay evaluators, this phase had the following three goals:

1. to determine those criteria which each evaluator uses when responding to placement writing samples
2. to ascertain differences between what evaluators say they use in placing students and the criteria they actually use
3. to compare grading criteria used by the evaluators

Gathering Information

In studies during the last decade, Breland and Jones (1982) and Freeman (1979) attempted to determine whether evaluators use the criteria which they think (or say) they use when reading essays. In these reports a discrepancy exists between what instructors think they value and what, in fact, they weigh most heavily when responding to student writing. The question was, therefore, what criteria did RACC writing sample evaluators use when making placement determinations?

Information for this segment of the study came from three informal data sources. The first set of information came from the initial reader evaluation completed during phase one of the project. During that first reading, evaluators were asked to use a checksheet, modeled on criteria compiled by Breland and Jones (1982), to indicate reasons for specific placement determinations of randomly selected writing samples (See Appendix B.).

Another set of information came from the second reading of the placement samples by the evaluators. This time, because written comments on the checksheet indicated that evaluators were uncomfortable with the predetermined placement criteria, respondents were instructed to list in an open-ended fashion three (or more) criteria which influenced their placement of a specific essay (See Appendix C.). Evaluator interview questions focusing on criteria used in placing composition, developmental, and borderline level students provided the third strand of information (See Appendix D.). Three to five weeks lapsed between each phase of the information-gathering.

Comparing Information

These three sources of information reveal not only an internal consistency for RACC evaluators but also a group accord in using placement criteria. For each respondent a consistency in the responses on the checklist, on the open-ended sheets, and in the oral discussion of grading criteria seems to exist. Particularly significant are the open-ended written responses and the oral interview responses which show both personal and group consistency.

For every evaluator in this study, the top three criteria cited in open-ended response to specific essay placements show nearly one hundred

percent correlation with what the faculty member listed as important placement criteria during the interview segment of this research. More importantly, when arranged in a pattern for all of the evaluators, the items selected by individuals correspond (sometimes with different phrasing, which was defined during the interview) to items selected by other members of the evaluation team. (Table 1-8 shows an overview of the grading criteria.)

Once the definitions for key terms are supplied, the relationships among evaluative criteria for RACC placement exam readers are apparent in Table 1-8. Certainly the first three categories (not in order of evaluation importance) in Table 1-8--development, sentence combining, and surface features--demonstrate a consensus among the evaluators. Even categories 4 and 5 show a similarity in evaluative criteria among the readers. In category 4, for instance, "coherence" seems to imply a cognitive connectiveness for the respondents, while in category 5, four of the five respondents indicate that a surface arrangement or connection of ideas ("organization," "surface coherence," "connectiveness," "cohesiveness") is important when responding to student placement essays. Even "paragraph structure," listed by evaluator three as a feature used when responding to essays, seems to imply surface arrangement of ideas consistent with the responses by the other individuals for the final category of Table 1-8.

6. Phase Three: Interfacing Evaluator Placement Criteria With Course Goals

A general consensus of internal criteria used by placement examination readers is only a single facet of the quest to improve validity of writing

Table 1-8

Comparison of Individual Criteria Used

EVALUATOR 1	2	3	4	5
development	concreteness in support and content	examples, illustrations, details to develop an idea	development, support for an idea	development
sentence style, combining	style (including concise and precise diction, appropriate tone, and sentence combining	sentence structure	sentence correctness, maturity and combining	sentence combining
surface (spelling, punctuation, and grammar)	surface (spelling, punctuation, and mechanics)	mechanics and punctuation	surface (spelling and punctuation)	surface (some spelling, punctuation, subject-verb agreement, etc.
focus*	logical coherence**	reasonableness	coherence (cognitive unity)	coherence
organization+	surface coherence **	paragraph structure	connectiveness	cohesiveness#

*focus--"all leads to one unified point"

**logical coherence--"fluency in the arrangement of ideas"

+ organization--"arrangement of ideas to support one unified point"

++surface coherence--linking words

cohesiveness--"hanging together"

(All definitions were provided by the evaluators during the interview segment of the research.)

sample placements. To be relevant for use as placement determiners, the evaluative criteria must directly relate to the entrance requirements for the higher level Composition (HU 121) course. Students who do not meet these requirements will then be placed in the lower Developmental Writing. (HU 101) course.

Establishing the relationship between grading criteria and course levels became the third phase of this project. Three specific goals for this phase involved the following:

1. to determine those entrance requirements which each evaluator believes necessary for entrance into the higher (Composition) level course
2. to compare individual goals to establish a composite of Humanities Division goals for placement into the higher (Composition) level course
3. to interface group evaluative criteria (from phase of the project) with course entrance requirements

The separate interviews with RACC's writing sample evaluation team provided the list of individually-preferred entrance requirements for the Composition (HU 121) class. All the respondents agreed that serious problems in grammar and punctuation belonged in the Developmental Writing (HU 101) class. This surface feature, however, was neither the first nor the most important factor cited by any of the evaluators when providing the list of criteria for Composition (HU 121) placement. Table 1-9 indicates the entrance skills for Composition (HU 121) placement listed by each evaluator.

Table 1-9

Comparison of Individual Criteria Listed For Placement in Composition (HU 121)

EVALUATOR 1	EVALUATOR 2	EVALUATOR 3	EVALUATOR 4	EVALUATOR 5
variety of sentence structure and length; ability to write subordinate information to idea in main clause	better than Dick and Jane sentences; maturity of style; subordination and coordination for emphasis	complete sentences; basics of sentence structure, syntax, variety, and correctness	sentence sense; embedding, subordination, variety, logical connection of sentenced parts	sentence crafting skills, including embedding, variety, etc.
reasonably clear and coherent discussion	logical order at some deeper level	sense of structure	logical connectiveness	cohesiveness+
control	transitions to show connections	organization	relative connectiveness; flow of ideas	unity, fluency
familiarity with writing and committing an idea to paper	ability to write at some level	sense of knowing what an essay (paragraph) is	sense of creating meaning by using words, sentences, and paragraphs	sense of writing, of putting together parts to make a whole
no severe problems with grammar, spelling, and punctuation	control of surface features **	no major problems with spelling, punctuation, and grammar	control of surface errors++	control of grammar and punctuation
		sense of development	sense of using details or support	supporting evidence; development

* coherent--(coherence)--"means at its base that it is all together and... this produces unity"

** surface features--"spelling, punctuation, and mechanics"

+ cohesiveness--"hanging together"

++surface features--"punctuation and spelling"

All definitions were provided by the evaluators during the interview segment of the research.

Table 1-9 demonstrates that, except for a difference in key terms, evaluators agree that sentence crafting, connectiveness, organization, writing sense, and a minimal number of surface errors are the basic skills required for entrance into the Composition (HU 121) level course. The only apparent difference in skills listed by the respondents is the addition of a sixth category, development (or "using details or support" as indicated by Evaluator 4), by Evaluators 3, 4, and 5.

Citing Cooper (1977) and Follman and Anderson (1967), Charney (1984) agrees that "a homogeneous group of raters can achieve high levels of reliability." RACC's writing sample evaluation team, all members of the Humanities division who have taught both Composition (HU 121) and Developmental Writing (HU 101) for several years, have that homogeneous background and experience. A comparison of the criteria these readers use in making placement judgements and the skills they believe are necessary for placement into a specific course are reasonably similar. Sentence combining, surface features, surface connectiveness, coherence, and development in nuances of meaning and level appear on nearly every evaluator's list of grading criteria. (See Table 1-8 above.) Sentence crafting, coherence, surface features, connectiveness, writing sense, and

development, again with variable levels of meaning, appear on nearly every evaluator's list for Composition (HU 121) entrance requirements. (See Table 1-9 above.)

Obviously, to say that there is total agreement among the evaluators and between their evaluation criteria and the entrance requirements for Composition (HU 121) not only would be inaccurate but also would reduce a necessarily complex inter-and-intra-relationship to a meaningless, simplified process. What is equally obvious, however, is that the homogeneity of experience and philosophy among these faculty members provides a strong basis from which to determine nuances of differences among certain skills evaluated and required by the respondents and on which to construct a grading scale to improve both the reliability and validity of placement determinations at RACC.

7. Phase Four: Identifying and Minimizing Evaluator Sensitivities and Problems

In addition to using evaluation criteria and course goals to establish either formal analytic scales with which to grade essays (Diederich, 1974) or informal reminders during the evaluator retraining sessions proceding each placement test reading (Myers, 1980), individual problems and sensitivities during the reading sessions must be minimized.

To identify areas provoking idiosyncratic responses by the evaluators (even those supposedly eliminated by retrainings before each placement reading session) on individual essays and to solicit suggestions to minimize or eliminate these problems became the fourth phase of this project. Specific goals for this phase involved the following:

1. to determine test-specific items to which evaluators are sensitive
2. to solicit suggestions to minimize test-response factors which influence specific reader evaluation

The source of the information was the interviews conducted with each RACC placement test reader.

Identifying Influencing Factors

Topics and Responses

Among the sensitivities cited by four readers were personal, anecdotal responses. Consistent with ideas on "writer-based prose" (Flower, 1979) and a "sense of outside audience" (White, 1985), the ego-centered response was labeled a problem because, according to one evaluator, "An ability to relate personal tragedy does not always translate into an ability to do the academic writing required in composition, and the distinction between those who can and cannot (move beyond personal writing) is hard to make on the basis of an anecdotal placement essay." One respondent added that having students write on topics that are important to them, while desirable after classroom discussions of rhetorical strategies and audience awareness, frequently produces problems for those students attempting to handle these topics in a placement writing sample. The egocentric nature of the reply promoted by these "too-close topics" leads, according to one evaluator, "to a chapter out of a student's autobiography."

Other topic-related issues listed in more than half of the interviews were religious responses, those "that imply that conversion of the reader is the sole purpose of the writer" and which "use faith as an excuse for not proving anything clearly in the paragraph;" sexist papers; and romanticized responses.

Specific questions also produced their share of comments during the taped interviews. A 1983-1984 topic ("Discuss the greatest advantage of living in the city (or the suburbs, country, etc.) Explain and support your statement.") was unanimously rejected by the evaluators and produced responses labeled "romanticized" and "inane."

Another topic from 1983-1984 ("Discuss one important adjustment an individual must make after either the death of a close family member or a divorce. Explain and support.") also prompted unanimous comment. The thought of one evaluator, that the universal experience of death or divorce promoted better-than-average placement responses, was rejected by the rest of the placement readers, who felt that personal stories, which usually resulted from this topic, provided less than desirable placement essays.

A third question cited as troublesome was "Should parents have the right to censor their children's textbooks? Give reasons for your response." While all evaluators agreed that this topic has provided less personal, more "outside-audience" prose, the meaning of "censor," frequently misinterpreted by the test-takers, continues to create a problem (this topic is still being used) when responding to essays on that topic.

Topics offering variable strategies ("compare and/or contrast") or "variable subjects" ("How much freedom and responsibility should be granted to teenagers by their parents? Support your response.") were also identified as troublesome by the evaluators. Commented one instructor, "In 20-25 minutes, these (placement test) writers have to select a subject, decide what to say about it, and compose a reasonable response. Forcing students to make other choices just in interpreting a question seems just too much to ask."

Secondary Influencing Factors

Several secondary factors that influence a specific evaluator's responses to the writing tests were also listed during the interview. These features include problems with which the current term's writing students are struggling, and handwriting, the "kind that shows a lack of familiarity with pencils or pens."

Suggestions to Minimize Test-Response Factors

Topics and Responses

To achieve valid measurement of writing ability, personal sensitivities to reader-unique factors must be minimized. Placement test readers, even when trained as writing sample evaluators, however, can only diminish the effect of idiosyncratic responses. One area which RACC evaluators feel will improve the validity of their responses is to continue to review the design of the questions to eliminate those to which readers are sensitive and with which students have apparent difficulty. Among the topic-related suggestions offered during the interview segment of this project, the following points were repeated:

1. format all questions in a parallel way
2. minimize possibilities for personal (autobiographical) responses
3. test questions before using them for placement

All evaluators admitted that the ideal test topic (prompt) has remained elusive during the 6 years of placement testing at RACC. The idea of maintaining a parallel format in placement questions by using self-structuring questions (e.g., "Give three causes for....") or by using directive statements (e.g., "Take a stand") was endorsed by at least two respondents to "get the students moving" during the brief time allotted for the placement test writing sample. The idea of parallelism or calling for the same rhetorical strategy in the prompts used on the placement sample is supported by Charney (1982) and McColly (1970) who contend that writers cannot equally and reliably respond to papers that measure different writing strategies.

While the parallel structure may eliminate the problem which evaluators face of having to respond to essays which have different

purposes, it may also help students move away from personal storytelling. By structuring the prompt and asking students to move beyond their egocentric stances (by citing causes of a problem, taking a stand on a controversial issue, etc.), evaluators may also help to eliminate the romanticized and anecdotal responses with which they have cited problems. In addition to controlling the phrasing of the prompts, one evaluator suggested using more future-oriented and/or positive social topics to eliminate "personal tragedies," which are frequently composed on placement essays.

One final suggestion for improving topics was to use a passage, a story, or a narrative situation as a basis for student placement essays. Criticized by White (1985) who believes that excerpted passages are not clear to the students who have to respond to them, the idea of using a passage supports Myers' (1980) belief that a prompt should be "a way to stimulate fluent student writing, not a test of a student's knowledge of special facts" (p. 12). While excerpted literary passages may create a problem identified by White, especially if the passages demand interpretation, using a narrative of a real-life situation that forces a student to take a stand in response to that situation merits investigation as a topic possibility. Certainly, only after testing can this type of writing prompt show whether it achieves what according to White is the goal of a good topic: "allow(ing) the weak students to write comfortable enough at their level...and challenge(ing) the best students to produce their best work" (p. 111).

Secondary Influencing Factors

Non-topic influencing factors on placement writing samples fall into several categories: those which have demonstrated little difficulty for

evaluators when determining placement, those that can be diminished by evaluator training, and those to which readers must make an adjustment.

The length factor falls under the first heading: it does not seem to interfere with the consensus of placement decisions. One faculty evaluator noted the "one or two sentences, no matter how well-crafted, indicate a student who needs a developmental course for either writing experience or writing confidence-building." Other evaluators agreed, stating that essays that fall well below the minimum number of words (150) usually are placed directly into the developmental writing course. One respondent suggested having those who cannot write more than a few sentences return for a second writing placement test on a different topic. That suggestion, argued the evaluator, will give people a second chance to produce their best work in a test situation.

Responding to elements in placement essays with which the current term's writing students are struggling is a problem which falls into the second category of influence: it can be diminished by training the evaluator before a placement reading session. Evaluators sensitive to the writing problems of their classroom students admitted that sometimes just reminding themselves about their response to certain writing problems helps to eliminate the influence. For this group of evaluators, refamiliarizing themselves with the levels of performance required for specific course placements or using anchor papers and group ranking criteria (Myers 1980) is usually enough to eliminate idiosyncratic responses to particular writing traits.

Handwriting, not so easily overlooked, falls into the third category: one to which evaluators must adjust. Providing carefully sharpened pencils for students was one suggestion. Providing wider lines on the students'

response sheets also earned an endorsement. Although these practices may help improve the physical appearance of the page, all evaluators agreed that "reading carefully," "slowing down," "re-reading," and "concentrating more" are all adjustments they make when faced with less decipherable handwriting.

8. Phase Five: Suggestions to Improve RACC's Writing Sample Procedures

Designing the writing assessment instrument and recognizing individual evaluator sensitivities are only part of the complex writing placement process. The validity and reliability of placement measurements fit into a larger segment of the evaluation system. To solicit suggestions to improve evaluators' participation in that system was the single goal of phase five of this project. The taped interviews with evaluators again provided information for this segment.

Suggestions

Writing Topics and Reader Assignments

Systematizing the writing placement test evaluation process, from designing the prompts to assigning essay readers, headed the suggestions listed by the staff. Several evaluators noted that constructing and testing possible placement topics, while admittedly difficult and time-consuming, should be part of an ongoing process and not "something thought about in crisis situations."

Several project participants also suggested organizing the assignment of placement reading chores. With only four full-time faculty members in the Humanities division for the 1985-86 academic year, rotating the reading chores, according to one respondent, is "the only way to be fair both to evaluators and to students." As an alternative to individual reading

assignments, one evaluator proposed group placement-reading sessions, with scoring dates established at the start of each term. Summer placement-reading assignments were noted as especially crucial by several interview participants. According to one evaluator, "Currently, being in the building on a testing day or just walking into the Counseling Office on personal business is enough to guarantee placement reading duties; conversely, being outside the building during summer session sometimes results in few placement reading assignments."

Whether assigning individual readers or establishing group grading sessions, the noted scoring position preferences by RACC evaluators was suggested as a means to improve placement essay responses. (This scoring position preference is based on a current system which allows readers to see the score(s) of previous evaluators of that writing sample.) While evaluators unanimously contended that they had no real problems disagreeing with a colleague's decision, at least two respondents admitted "feeling obliged" to re-read an essay if they had disagreed with a previous reader. These two evaluators, therefore, listed a first-reader position as desirable. Of the remaining readers, one respondent cited first or second; another, second or third; and a last desiring to "be a tie-breaker rather than a tie-maker," the third-reader position.

<u>While attention to reader scoring positions may help to improve the attitudes of the RACC placement evaluators, the suggested group grading sessions, if attempted, have to recognize the specific grading rituals of RACC faculty evaluators</u>. Although several respondents expressed a desire "to get together to grade papers," these same individuals admitted to reading aloud, walking while reading, or needing freedom from distractions when evaluating. Therefore, unless grading rituals are eliminated (by the

formal retraining of holistic evaluation) or until the need to confer with others on placement decisions outweighs the need for personal routines, same-room group grading sessions may not work for all RACC placement evaluators. One final suggestion for handling specific placement problems is to discuss responses to representative essays at division meetings.

When responding to questions about evaluating placement writing samples, each interviewed person introduced the problems of grading placement samples at Open Registration. Citing dual responsibilities of advising students and reading essays, all respondents noted that trying to perform the two tasks negates any attempts to make valid and reliable measurements of writing ability and, therefore, is unfair to the students whose papers are being evaluated. The additional confusion of the registration room and the conflicting demands by test administrators, colleagues and students combine to make several evaluators concerned and uncomfortable with making placement designations at that time. One respondent suggested relieving placement test evaluators from Open Registration duties to allow them to respond to writing samples in another designated area of the college. In this way, explained the faculty member, "Reading placement essays becomes a primary and singular focus, as it should be to make valid and reliable placement determinations, rather than a secondary chore performed around student advisement tasks." The only staff adjustment required to implement this alternative schedule for placement test evaluators is to assign students normally advised by the Humanities division during Open Registration to another division (e.g., Science/Mathematics) or to Counseling.

Evaluation Criteria

The suggestion to discuss borderline essays in a division meeting repeated the desire of all project participants to increase articulation among placement evaluators. In reaffirming the importance of articulation, four faculty members identified areas from individual course levels to particular evaluation criteria with which they felt unfamiliar. Specifically, one respondent expressed uncertainty about the perceived level in Composition (changes in that course were initiated during the 1984-1985 academic year) while another felt insecure about determining the level of students for Basics of College Writing (the scope of this class was changed during the 1983-84 year; in addition, the name for the developmental writing class was adopted for Fall 1985). Explained one evaluator, "Sometimes (when I read writing samples), I want to call an instant meeting of the (Humanities) division." This uncertainty was echoed by another, who said, "I feel I don't always know in what course, especially because we've changed DSP (developmental writing) and Comp., that a really borderline student's needs will be met." Added another, "Sometimes I'd really like to get everyone together to find out how they would respond to a specific essay. I need to measure myself against other people (evaluators) to make sure I know what I'm doing."

Four division members also recommended establishing specific placement evaluation criteria as a means of improving the validity of placement determinations. While individual scoring criteria are internal, they are related (Tables 1-8 and 1-9) among the faculty evaluators. Even without a specific knowledge of the inter-reader consistency of their goals, several evaluators expressed a need for a scoring guide and a willingness to test it for use in making placement decisions. Asserted one respondent. "Not

only might the guide assist faculty evaluators, but also it may provide criteria for those outside the (Humanities) division who seem skeptical about the basis for (writing) course placements." Certainly, grading scales, such as the one proposed by Diederich (1974), are available. The relationship between individual criteria and course goals for evaluators in this project (Tables 1-8 and 1-9), however, may provide a strong basis on which to build a specific RACC placement scale.

Evaluation Process

In addition to suggestions to improve writing sample scoring procedures came suggestions from the evaluators for improvement of the placement testing process. Letting the students know what they should do in clear terms ("rather than in English teacher terms, such as 'variety'") and telling the students the significance of the test were proposed. Some test administrators, attempting to allay test anxiety, do not always stress the importance of the test to determine courses for students. (These results were compiled from a survey conducted among developmental writing class students in Spring 1985; as a result, some students do not give the writing test their best effort.) Other proposals included designing the student essay response sheet to include a specific place for the evaluation score, providing more space for the students to write, and allowing more time (and requiring more length) for the placement writing sample.

A final suggestion, from three evaluators, was to identify any borderline students (even if improved evaluation and testing methods eliminate the higher numbers of students who are classified "borderline") by some designation on the computer placement screen. (Currently, the placement screen for advisors lists only the recommended course.) Having this borderline designation, argued one faculty member, will enable

advisors to talk with individual students, assess other external criteria about the students (e.g., number and types of other courses, work and family schedules, etc.), make students aware of learning support services, and more effectively place individuals in appropriate courses for a specific term.

Final Summary

The simple model for the placement writing sample, begun at RACC in 1979, has evolved into a complex process. For the two-reader placement essays used in this study, measurement seems consistent as well as valid. Not only have the same individuals closely duplicated their original evaluations of these essays, but also those students in this study placed in Composition by a two-reader assessment scored a C or better 90 percent of the time.

On the other hand, representative three-reader essays demonstrate a lack of consistent measurement. Not only did project evaluators fail with any consistency to duplicate original scores on the essays, but also students in this study originally placed in Composition on the basis of a three-reader assessment scored below a C 43 percent of the time. (Certainly, one might argue that student motivation, personal problems, instructors, or any one of a number of factors had an influence on the performance of these three-reader students; however, in a larger three-reader sample at RACC (Schum, 1985b), 40.9 percent of the students placed in Composition scored below a C.) Significant for the current study, moreover, is the 66.7 percent of those students registered in Composition and scoring below a C were placed in Developmental Writing by four out of five evaluators when their placement essays were re-assessed for this project.

Borderline papers are among the problems recognized by the writing sample evaluators. Other difficulties include instructor sensitivities, topic selections, test design, and evaluation criteria. The participants in the project, however, are not without suggestions for reform.

One of the most obvious suggestions is to continue trying to construct essay topics that provide responses which (1) encourage students to produce representative writing samples and (2) enable test-readers validly to measure identified composition skills. Another suggestion much more basic to the idea of valid measurement, however, is improving the articulation among test evaluators. This articulation must seek to determine specific course level goals and to formulate--if only to remind (retrain?) test-readers of group goals before each evaluating session--a guide for essay scoring.

Attempting to design a process which provides reliable measurement and which places students in writing courses consistent with their abilities is a significant undertaking, basic to the concept of placement testing. The RACC evaluators, both philosophically and practically, are ready to begin the challenge of improving their placement measurement procedures.

The most significant comments provided by evaluators during each interview were not prompted by a specific question. Instead, unsolicited, each evaluator repeated a philosophical commitment to the writing sample and emphasized the importance of the placement process, both to students and placement readers. Said one evaluator, "I know that for me a particular (placement) essay is one of many on the same topic and with the same insights of hundreds that went before, but I can't help thinking about how important that piece of paper is to the student." Another added, "I frequently complain about doing (reading) writing samples, but when I

consider how poorly students were placed without these essays, I decide that what we have here (at RACC) is better than what a lot of schools have."

A more measurable asset to help RACC evaluators improve their placement determinations is found in phase two and three (Tables 1-8 and 1-9) of this report. In these project segments, Humanities placement test evaluators show both an inter-rater consistency when identifying writing sample scoring criteria and an apparent relationship between group--identified evaluation criteria and the composite of skills deemed necessary for placement in Composition.

Obviously, clarifying division philosophies and course goals is part of the ongoing evaluation process by RACC's Humanities division, as it is for any academic division. The triad demanded for placement evaluations, however, requires a unique blend of philosophies, knowledge, and attitudes not required of many other academic tasks. Demanded for that triad are a respectful relationship among evaluators, an accepted conformity to group evaluation criteria, and a goal-specific connectiveness between evaluation criteria and course requirements. To achieve that balance demands a commitment by all evaluators to the evolving placement test process at RACC.

The simple model has become complex, and the placement measurement model, while acceptable for most students and writing instructors, can become even more reliable and valid. Students more consistently must be placed in appropriate courses. Moreover, the basis on which they are placed in the appropriate writing classes must be one that can be composed from the essay topic and evaluated by the placement readers. The process

sounds simple; moving towards that process, however, is not without its relearning, retraining, and re-examining.

RACC"s writing placement test model is in its seventh year, but it is only beginning. As RACC evaluators try to assess suggested improvements, they can be certain that by participating in this process, they are increasing their understanding of the writing process. White (1985) identifies the "great gulf that now exists between the measurement and teaching of writing" (p. 1). For the placement evaluators at RACC, that gulf is diminishing.

PART B: PROFILE OF THIRD-READER WRITING PLACEMENT TEST STUDENTS

Since 1979 Reading Area Community College (RACC) Humanities faculty have evaluated placement writing samples in order to assign appropriate first writing classes to incoming students. Reading each essay independently and scoring each writing sample holistically, based on the idea that the whole of a written response is greater than the sum of its parts (Diederich, 1974; Myers, 1980), two faculty members assign one of two scores, HU 121 (Composition) or HU 101 (Basics of College Writing, RACC's developmental writing class), to each paper. If the two scores are the same, the RACC writing sample placement procedure (except for a follow-up, first-day-of-class writing sample) is complete. With only two possible score designations, however, there are those papers for which a single placement determination is difficult, causing readers to disagree. For these papers, presumably exhibiting skills that fall between defined entrance requirements of Composition and stated exit requirements of Basics of College Writing, a third reader is required to determine placement.

Since the inception of the placement writing sample at RACC, three-reader papers have existed. With a change in the level of Basics of College Writing in 1983, however, the number of three-reader essays has increased. (The change in the level of the developmental writing course may not be the direct cause for the increasing percentage of three-reader essays, but the increased difficulty of the lower level course seems to have made the distinction between the composition and developmental writers more difficult to make.)

Following an assessment of RACC's writing sample evaluation system in order to improve the validity of placement measurement (Schum, 1985a), a profile of three-reader students became the response to the increasing percentage of borderline essays each academic year.

1. Specific Project Goals

Creating a profile of three-reader students in RACC's writing placement procedures had several specific purposes:

1. to investigate descriptive, academic characteristics shared by three-reader students
2. to monitor the success of three-reader students in writing classes
3. to assess the performance of three-reader students in college programs
4. to reveal factors having potential influence on the retention of three-reader students at RACC

2. Getting Started

To begin the study, 100 three-reader placement essays from the 1983-1984 Academic Year were randomly gathered. Because of transcript or test-response irregularities, five of the originally-selected essays were not used. Of the 95 students represented in the remaining sample:

-18 never attended the college,

-50 stopped attending the college,

-24 still attend the college, and

- 3 took the placement test in their sophomore year and graduated.

After the essays of the three sophomore test-takers were removed from the study sample, the remaining 92 papers, representing students whose placement required a third reader, were assigned identification numbers.

3. Age-Major-Reading Scores

A review of placement files revealed basic academic information shared by three-reader students. Initial information collected included age (at registration), major, and Nelson-Denny reading scores. Table 2-1 displays the age profile of three-reader students according to placement level.

Table 2-1

Percentage of Three-Reader Attending* Students in Age Groups According to Course Level

COURSE LEVEL	AGE						
	under 25	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	50-54
Composition	57.7	7.7	7.7	3.8	15.4	7.7	0.0
Developmental	66.7	6.7	6.7	8.9	8.9	0.0	2.2

* Attending--those students who attended RACC for at least one term

In Table 2-1, the high percentage of students under 25 is repeated for both placement levels, with 57.7% of the Composition students and 66.7% of

the developmental students younger that 25. In addition, 15.4% of the Composition-level students range from 40 to 44. No other age group for either placement level represents more than 8.9% of the three-reader students.

A similar configuration appears in Table 2-2, displaying registration age according to attendance status of three-reader students.

Table 2-2

Percentage of Three-Reader Attending* Students in Age Groups According to Attendance Status

ATTENDANCE STATUS	AGE						
	under 25	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	50-54
Still Attending	41.7	16.7	8.3	20.8	8.3	4.2	0.0
Stopped Attending	76.0	2.0	6.0	0.0	12.0	2.0	2.0

* Attending--those students who attended RACC for at least one term

In Table 2-2, 41.7% of the still attending students fall into the under-25 age category, with 76% of three-reader students who stopped attending RACC also under age 25. In addition, 20.8% of the still-attending students range from 35 to 39 and 16.7% from 25 to 29. Age totals for all individuals represented in this report (including those who never attended) show that 63% of the three-reader students are under 25 and 69.6%, under 30.

The age data for under-25 three-reader students provides additional information. For instance, course placement (Composition or Basics of

College Writing) does not make a significant difference in college retention for the under-25 students who complete at least one RACC term. Among the under-25 attending students in this study, 11.7% of the Composition-level individuals and 10.3% of the developmental-level individuals still attend the college. Even closer statistically, 41.2% of the Composition-level students and 41.3% of the developmental-level students stopped attending the college. The greatest statistical difference, 2.9% of the Composition-level students, appear in the never-attended, under-25 sample. The number of Composition students in that segment of the study is so small, however, that valid conclusions cannot be drawn.

Overall, 82.7% of the under-25 students either stopped attending or never attended the college. The low retention rate among this age group reveals a topic for further study by college personnel.

4. Majors

Majors extend the basic profile of three-reader students in this project. Ranking highest are Business-related majors; 40.7% of the Composition-level and 44.4% of the developmental-level students represent the Business Division. Extending majors to include all three-reader students (including those who never attended) reveals that 2.4 times more Business than Liberal Arts majors, the next highest course program listed for three-reader students, appear in the research sample.

Table 2-3 examines majors selected by three-reader students according to attendance status.

Table 2-3

Percentage of Three-Reader Attending* Students in Each Major According to Attendance Status

ATTENDANCE STATUS	MAJORS				
	Business Related[1]	Liberal Arts	Pre-Allied Health	Adjunct	Miscellaneous
Still Attending	50.2	12.5	29.3	0.0	8.3
Stopped Attending	40.0	26.0	12.0	12.0	10.0

* Attending--those students who have attended RACC for at least one term

[1] Business-related majors include Accounting; Business Administration; Data Processing; Executive, Legal, and Medical Secretarial Science; Industrial Engineering Technology; and Industrial Engineering Technology

Eliminating the number of adjunct students from Table 2-3, those who by definition do not intend to complete a RACC degree, raises the percentages for those who stopped attending in Table 2-3 to Business-related, 45.5%; Liberal Arts, 29.5%; Pre-Allied Health, 13.6%; and Miscellaneous, 11.3%. (50% of those in the Miscellaneous category declared Social Work majors.)

More significant than a survey of majors, however, is the relationship between majors and continuing attendance at RACC. Changing the configuration of the declared major information according to attendance provides the basis for comparison in Table 2-4.

Table 2-4

Comparison of Percentage of Three-Reader Students in Each Major According to Attendance

ATTENDANCE STATUS	MAJOR				
	Business Related	Liberal Arts	Pre-Allied Health	Adjunct	Miscellaneous
Still Attending	29.3	16.7	53.8	0.0	22.2
Stopped Attending	48.8	72.2	37.5	75.0	55.6
Never Attended	21.9	11.1	18.8	25.0	22.2

Although the small size of the sample must be considered when reviewing data in Table 2-4, certain attendance trends seem obvious among this group of students. First of all, Pre-Allied Health majors not only have the highest percentage of still-attending students but also are the only group for whom the percentage of students still-attending exceeds the percentage for those no longer attending. Moreover, Liberal Arts majors have the lowest percentage of still-attending students (other than adjuncts); 72.2% of the Liberal Arts majors in this study left the college within a year.

Several issues help to place that 72.2% statistic in perspective. First of all, "Liberal Arts" is frequently used as an initial designation for those who have not determined a course of study when entering RACC; "undecided," therefore, often fits this program category more than the

traditional Liberal Arts label. Moreover, RACC's true Liberal Arts majors often are transfer students, those who intend to take courses at the college and then transfer to a four-year school. Further study is needed to determine if the Liberal Arts students in this study stopped attending RACC because of transfer plans or for other reasons.

5. Reading Scores

Nelson-Denny scores, part of the placement test information gathered on each incoming RACC student, complete the basic profile of three-reader students. Divided according to course placement, the average Nelson-Denny scores appear in Table 2-5.

Table 2-5

Comparison of Average Nelson-Denny Scores for Three-Reader Attending* Students According to Course Placement

COURSE LEVEL	NELSON-DENNY CATEGORIES			
	Vocabulary	Comprehension	Reading	Total
Composition	13.9	13.4	13.7	
Developmental	13.0	11.9	12.6	

* Attending--those students who have attended RACC for at least one term.

The significant category in Table 2-5 is comprehension. A 1.5 grade-level difference between Composition and developmental students reveals less than the fact that 13.8% of those placed in Composition scored below a 10.0 in the comprehension category compared to 31.8% of those

placed in Basics of College Writing. Evaluating comprehension scores for these two course levels also shows that 72.4% of the students placed in Composition scored above 12.0 in comprehension, and 57.8% of the students placed in Basics of College Writing scored above that 12.0 cutoff.

Table 2-6 presents the relationship between Nelson-Denny reading scores and attendance status for individuals in this study.

Table 2-6

Comparison of Average Nelson-Denny Scores for Three-Reader Attending* Students According to Attendance Status

ATTENDANCE STATUS	READING CATEGORIES		
	Vocabulary	Comprehension	Reading Total
Still Attending	13.9	12.9	13.5
Stopped Attending	13.1	12.5	13.0

* Attending--those students who have attended RACC for at least one term

According to the data appearing in Table 2-6, still-attending students scored between 0.5 and 0.8 of a grade level higher in each category than those who stopped attending. With such high reading levels, however, that variation cannot be considered significant. Even the difference in percentage of students scoring above and below a 12.0 reading level shows little relevant information except that in this group of three-reader students, 77.8% of the still-attending students have above 13.5 in the Reading Total category. An examination of Nelson-Denny scores also reveals

that three-reader students who who never attended RACC average between 0.1 and 0.9 of a grade level below the stopped-attending students in each of the three Nelson-Denny categories.

Examining average Nelson-Denny reading levels for students who complete their first writing class reveals only marginally significant information. In the first Nelson-Denny category, vocabulary, the average score for composition students completing their initial course is 13.5 compared to an average score of 13.3 for developmental students. While average comprehension and reading total marks also are lower for developmental than for composition students, the differences in average range form only 0.3 to 0.5 reading grade levels (Table 2-7).

Table 2-7

Average Nelson-Denny Reading Category Scores For Those Completing First Writing Class According to Placement Level

PLACEMENT LEVEL	READING CATEGORIES		
	Vocabulary	Comprehension	Reading Total
Composition	13.5	13.0	13.4
Developmental	13.3	12.5	13.1

The high reading level averages (Table 2-7) for both developmental and Composition students as well as the closeness in the average reading scores between the placement levels show only that these borderline students (as a group) score above the 12.0 cutoff, a reading level directly related to student success in RACC classes (Matzelle, 1985; Wolff, 1983).

Complementing the 12.0 reading level importance is Table 2-8, displaying average Nelson-Denny scores for students scoring above a C in their first writing classes.

Table 2-8

Average Nelson-Denny Scores for Students Earning C or Above in First Writing Classes According to Placement Level

PLACEMENT LEVEL	NELSON-DENNY CATEGORIES		
	Vocabulary	Comprehension	Reading Total
Composition	14.5	13.9	14.2
Developmental	13.8	12.9	13.6

Table 2-8 reveals that average reading scores for Composition students exceed those for developmental students by from 0.6 to 1.0 grade levels; seemingly more significant for this study group, however, is the fact that reading scores again range above the 12.0 level deemed necessary for student success at RACC. With the high reading levels in Table 2-8, further relevance for the differences in grade levels cannot be determined.

Examining the difference in reading scores for Composition and developmental students earning below C in their first writing class reveals a potentially significant relationship between grades in the first writing class and reading scores. Average reading scores for students earning below a C (D or R*) in their first writing classes are displayed in Table 2-9.

Table 2-9

Average Reading Scores for Students Scoring Below C in First Writing Classes According to Placement Level

PLACEMENT LEVEL	NELSON-DENNY CATEGORIES		
	Vocabulary	Comprehension	Reading Total
Composition	12.2	11.9	12.3
Developmental	12.6	11.9	12.3

* R grade is RACC equivalent of F

As Table 2-9 demonstrates, reading levels between Composition and developmental students in this study are closely aligned. Moreover, the descriptive information gained by comparing Table 2-8 with Table 2-9 shows that average reading scores for Composition students earning below C in their first writing classes range form 1.9 to 2.3 grade levels lower in each Nelson-Denny category than scores for Composition students above C and from 1.0 to 1.3 grade levels lower than scores for developmental students above C. The statistics also reveal that average comprehension levels for students earning below C in both Composition and developmental classes are 11.9 again consistent with the results of in-house studies showing the importance of 12.0 reading levels to guarantee success in RACC classes.

Helping to support the importance of the 12.0 reading score, especially for borderline Composition students, are figures displayed in Table 2-10.

Table 2-10

Average Reading Scores for Composition Level Students
According to Grades Earned in First Writing Class

NELSON-DENNY CATEGORIES	GRADES IN FIRST WRITING CLASS				
	A	B	C	D*	R
Vocabulary	---	15.1	13.8	14.2	11.9
Comprehension	---	14.2	13.7	16.5	11.3
Reading Total	---	14.5	13.9	15.3	11.9

* Only one student from this study earned a D grade in Composition

In Table 2-10, the downward trend in vocabulary scores from 15.1 to 11.9 corresponds to decreasing grades in Composition class. More important than the correlation between the decreases in reading levels and grade performance in Composition, however, is the consistency of a below-12.0 reading level in each Nelson-Denny category for students not passing their first writing class.

A similar profile of reading scores for developmental students is inconclusive and reveals reading levels below 12.0 in each Nelson-Denny category for students earning a D, and above 12.0 in each category for students failing the Developmental course.

6. Individual Reading Statistics

Another way of examining potential correlations between reading levels and writing scores is to examine individual reading profiles rather than

group totals, Table 2-11 reveals individual relationships between Nelson-Denny reading levels and grades in the first writing class.

Table 2-11

Percentage of Composition-Level Students Scoring Below 12.0 in Nelson-Denny Categories According to Grades in Writing Class

NELSON-DENNY CATEGORIES	GRADES IN COMPOSITION				
	A	B	C	D	R
Vocabulary	---	0.0	33.3	0.0	62.5
Comprehension	---	16.6	33.3	0.0	50.0
Reading Total	---	0.0	16.6	0.0	62.5

Table 2-11 substantiates the trends present in earlier configurations of the reading-writing relationships for borderline placement students at RACC. 62.5% of the students failing Composition have below 12.0 in the vocabulary and reading total categories according to the Nelson-Denny Test. In addition, 50% of those non-passing students scored under 12.0 in comprehension.

Displaying individual percentages of scores below 12.0 for Developmental students (Table 2-12) reveals similar reading-writing relationships for three-reader students placed in Basics of College Writing.

Table 2-12

Percentage of Developmental-Level Students Scoring Below 12.0 in Nelson-Denny Categories According to Grades in Writing Class

NELSON-DENNY CATEGORIES	GRADES IN BASICS OF COLLEGE WRITING				
	A	B	C	D	R
Vocabulary	0.0	10.0	16.6	50.0	55.6
Comprehension	0.0	50.0	33.3	50.0	33.3
Reading Total	0.0	40.0	33.3	50.0	33.3

The progressive increase in percentage of developmental students scoring below 12.0 in vocabulary (Table 2-12) directly reflects a drop in course grade for three-reader students in this study. In the remaining Nelson-Denny categories, comprehension and reading total, although the percentages of students earning each grade and scoring below 12.0 are high (caused in part by the small numbers in the sample), the numbers reveal only general information about the lower scores of the developmental students.

7. First Writing Class

Transcript review, focusing on the first writing class attempted by three-reader students, provides the next set of descriptive data. Studied features of the first writing class include the term (of the students' academic careers) in which the course is taken, the grade earned in the course, the number of credits taken with the writing class, and the

students' grade point averages during the terms in which the first writing class is completed.

Term of Writing Class Completion

Overall, 64.7% of the Composition-level students and 53.4% of the developmental-level students enrolled in their first required writing class. Table 2-13 displays the terms in which students (according to placement level) attempted that first writing class.

Table 2-13

Comparison of Percentage of Students Completing their First Writing Class in each term according to Placement Level

PLACEMENT LEVEL	TERMS OF ACADEMIC CAREER					
	1	2	3	4	5	NA
Composition	65.6	6.9	0.0	3.4	0.0	24.1
Developmental	48.9	13.3	0.0	2.2	4.4	31.1

Overall, 86.4% of the borderline students attempting a writing course enrolled in that class during their initial term at RACC.

Comparing first course completion with attendance status of the borderline students in this study reveals the configuration in Table 2-14.

Table 2-14

Comparison of Percentage of Students Completing their First Writing Class in each term according to Attendance Status

ATTENDANCE STATUS	TERMS OF ACADEMIC CAREER					
	1	2	3	4	5	NA
Still Attending	62.5	16.7	0.0	8.3	4.2	8.3
Stopped Attending	52.0	8.0	0.0	0.0	2.0	38.0

Table 2-14 reveals that 62.5% of the still-attending students compared to 52.0% of the stopped-attending students enrolled in a writing course during their first terms. Using only individuals attempting the first writing class to formulate statistics results in the following: 68% of the still-attending students who attempted writing took the course during their first RACC term; 84% of the stopped-attending students attempting writing also took the initial course during their first term. Overall, 77.4% of the students in this study scheduled a writing class during their first RACC term.

Statistics for students who did not complete a first writing class are equally revealing. Only 9.5% of those individuals who did not enroll in a writing class diring their first three academic terms were attending the college at the end of that academic year. (Eliminating the adjunct students from the sample of students not completing writing raises the percentage of those who continued attending to 13.3%)

Grades in First Writing Class

The grades in the first writing course, because these students are borderline writing students, can be expected to show relevant information. Table 2-15 displays the relationship between course grades and course levels.

Table 2-15

Comparison of Percentage of Students Earning
Each Grade in First Writing Class According to Placement Level

PLACEMENT LEVEL	GRADES					
	A	B	C	D	R	W
Composition	0.0	27.2	31.8	4.5	36.4	0.0
Developmental	9.7	32.3	19.4	6.5	29.0	3.2

Table 2-15 shows that 59% of the students placed in Composition scored C or better while 61.4% of the developmental students scored C or better. (41.6% of these Composition students and 5.3% of the developmental students earned their grades from full-time faculty members.) The success rates among these two groups reveal few, if any, conclusive differences. Similarly inconclusive is the failure rate for each level; 36.4% of the Composition-level students and 29.0% of the developmental-level students failed their respective courses. (44.6% of the below-C Composition students and 66.7% of the comparable developmental students received their grades from full-time faculty member.)

Grades and Attendance

Examining grades in the first writing class according to attendance

status (Table 2-16) provides potentially significant information about three-reader students.

Table 2-16

Comparison of Percentage of Students Earning Each Grade in First Writing Class According to Attendance Status

ATTENDANCE STATUS	GRADES					
	A	B	C	D	R	W
Still Attending	9.1	31.8	36.4	4.5	18.2	0.0
Stopped Attending	3.1	28.1	15.6	9.4	40.6	3.1

Table 2-16 shows that 77.3% of those who completed writing and are still attending the college scored a C or above in the first writing class. Conversely, 53.1% of those taking a first writing course who stopped attending the college scored below C, with 43.7% of these individuals failing to receive any credit for the course.

Another way of considering the relationship between grades and attendance is to examine the percentage of students receiving failing grades in their first writing course who continued their college careers. Of the students in this study who failed the first writing class only 30.7% are still attending RACC. Moreover, 75% of this still-attending group of students who failed the first writing class repeated the class.

Overall, for three-reader students in this study, continuing beyond one academic year at RACC seems directly related to the successful

completion of the first writing class. The specific grade for the course (at least for those scoring C or better) does not matter so much as the fact that the course is completed at an average (C) level.

Number of Credits with First Writing Course

The average number of credits completed during the term of their first writing course is 8.0 for for Composition-level students in this study and 6.5 for the developmental students. Table 2-17 presents the credit data according to course level.

Table 2-17

Percentage of Borderline Students Completing Numbers of Credits (including First Writing Class) According to Placement Level

PLACEMENT LEVEL	NUMBER OF CREDITS					
	3	6	7	9	10	12
Composition	9.1	31.8	4.5	50.0	0.0	4.5
Developmental	26.7	30.0	3.3	33.3	6.7	0.0

According to Table 2-17, 9.1% of the Composition-level students and 26.7% of the developmental level students took the first writing class by itself. In addition, 36.3% of the Composition and 33.3% of the developmental students carried a second course (3 credits = 1 non-lab course; 4 credits = 1 lab course) in the ten-week RACC term. 54.5% of the Composition students and and 40% of the developmental students carried 9 or more credits during the term in which they completed their first writing class.

Relating credit load to first writing course performance provides several pieces of data. Overall, 50% of those students who took the writing classes with no other classes passed. (The small numbers of these students may invalidate the importance of this statistic.) Students taking one other course with their first writing class had the greatest performance success; 88.9% of this sample passed the writing course. In addition, 62.5% of those taking two or more courses in addition to writing passed the writing class.

A revised configuration of credit information, according to attendance status, appears in Table 2-18.

Table 2-18

Comparison of Borderline Students Completing Number of Credits in Term of First Writing Class According to Attendance

ATTENDANCE STATUS	CREDITS					
	3	6	7	9	10	12
Still Attending	22.7	45.5	0.0	22.7	4.5	4.5
Stopped Attending	16.7	20.1	6.7	53.3	3.3	0.0

Relating attendance information to number of credits taken in the term of the first writing course shows that still-attending students average 6.5 credits per term while those who stopped attending average 7.3 credits per term. In addition, 56.6% of the three-reader students no longer attending the college attempted their first writing class while taking two other classes.

The grade point average during the three-reader students' first writing term also supplies retention information for individuals in this study. Table 2-19 displays grade point average for the first writing term according to course placement.

Table 2-19

Percentage of Students Achieving Specific Grade Point Averages During Term of First Writing Course According to Placement Level

PLACEMENT LEVELS	GRADE POINT AVERAGE							
	3.5-4.0	3.0-3.49	2.5-2.99	2.0-2.5	1.5-1.99	1.0-1.49	0.5 0.99	0.0-0.49
Composition	4.5	36.4	13.6	13.6	4.5	9.1	4.5	13.6
Developmental	16.1	12.9	16.1	16.1	0.0	16.1	3.2	19.4

In Table 2-19, 68.1% of the Composition students earned 2.0 or better (on a 4.0 point scale) computed to 61.2% of the students completing Basics of College Writing. Table 2-20 depicts grade point average in terms of attendance status.

Table 2-20

Percentage of Borderline Students Achieving Specific Grade Point Averages During Term of First Writing Course According to Attendance Status

ATTENDANCE STATUS	GRADE POINT AVERAGE							
	3.5-4.0	3.0-3.49	2.5-2.99	2.0-2.5	1.5-1.99	1.0-1.49	0.5-0.99	0.0-0.49
Still Attending	18.1	36.5	18.1	13.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	13.6
Stopped Attending	6.7	13.3	13.3	16.7	3.3	23.3	3.3	20.0

In Table 2-20, a clear distinction between individuals still attending and those not attending emerges. Only 13.6% of those still-attending scored below a 2.0 g.p.a. during the term in which they completed their first writing class. (All of these students enrolled only in a writing course and failed it for a 0.0 g.p.a.) On the other hand, 50% of those no-longer attending RACC scored below 2.0 in their first-writing-course term. (Six of those students, four of whom carried writing with no other courses, currently have a 0.0 g.p.a.)

While some may argue that college students below a 2.0 g.p.a. can be dismissed, RACC students have a probation period before dismissal occurs. However, 47.4% of the three-reader students earning below 2.0 during the term in which they completed their first writing course voluntarily left the college at the end of that below 2.0 term, and an additional 21.1% left

after a second term. In all, only 15.8% of those in this study scoring below 2.0 in the term in which they completed their first writing course still attend the college.

8. Second Writing Course

The second writing course completed by the borderline students in this sample also provides potentially important information about three-reader students. The second-writing-course information was evaluated in terms of the percentage of those completing the second course and the grade point average earned during the term of the second writing class.

Fifty percent of the three-reader Composition students who completed one writing course continued with a second one; 71% of the comparable developmental students also enrolled in a second writing class. (In the small sample of this study, none of the Composition-level students who stopped attending and only 55.6% of the developmental students who stopped attending completed a second writing class.)

Overall, the three-reader students in this study who took a second writing class (independent of the level or title of the class) were 2.3 times more likely to continue attending RACC than those who did not.

When completing a second writing class, 70% of the Composition-level students and 77.2% of the developmental-level students scored C or better. In addition, every member of the Composition group and 77.2% of the developmental students finished the term of their second writing class with a 2.0 or better grade point average. Combining these statistics shows that 84.4% of all three-reader students completing a second writing class scored above 2.0 in the term in which they completed their second writing class.

Table 2-21 provides one final facet of the second course information: second course performance in terms of attendance.

Table 2-21

Percentage of Students Scoring Above and Below C in Second Writing Class According to Attendance Status

ATTENDANCE STATUS	GRADES	
	Above C	Below C
Still Attending	85.0	15.0
Stopped Attending	58.3	41.7

An investigation of specific grades represented in Table 2-21 shows that 15% of the still-attending students scored As in their second writing class, with the remaining 70% of the above-C grades divided between Bs and Cs. Specific average to above-average grades are not so significant as the fact that 85% of the still-attending students scored C or better in the second writing class. Reversing the emphasis of these statistics shows that 41.7% of those who stopped attending the college scored below C in the second writing class.

9. Cumulative Statistics

A final area targeted by this study is a profile (Table 2-22) of cumulative statistics about the three-reader students. Among the topics covered were number of RACC terms completed, number of credits completed, and final grade point averages. (Obviously, for the still-attending students this information will change.) The source of the information was the transcript review.

Table 2-22

Average Cumulative Statistics for Three-Reader Students in this Study According to Placement Level

PLACEMENT LEVEL	CUMULATIVE STATISTICS		
	# RACC terms	# Credits	Final G.P.A.
Composition	2.8	18.1	2.09
Developmental	3.0	15.1	2.16

Table 2-22 reveals few differences between Composition and developmental students. The average number of terms completed by Composition students is 0.2 below the average number of terms completed by Developmental students. Similarly insignificant is the 0.07 difference in grade point average between students at the two writing levels. The only measurable difference between Composition and developmental students seems to occur in the middle category of Table 2-22, which shows that Composition students complete 3 credits (1 course) more than developmental students.

Much more revealing in final statistics is the relationship in cumulative statistics (Table 2-23) between still-attending and stopped-attending three-reader students.

Table 2-23

Average Cumulative Statistics for Three-Reader Students in this Study According to Attendance Status

ATTENDANCE STATUS	CUMULATIVE STATISTICS		
	# RACC terms	# Credits	Final G.P.A.
Still Attending	4.80	27.6	2.45
Stopped Attending	2.00	10.8	1.98

Currently, still-attending students in this study average 2.8 terms more than those who stopped attending. In addition, they have completed nearly 2.8 times more credits and have earned final grade totals that average 0.47 points higher than those three-reader students who stopped attending RACC.

10. Summary

The profile of three-reader students from the 1983-84 Academic Year reveals several non-unique characteristics. Some features, however, have potential significance as predictors of success or as warnings for future academic difficulty. While specific conclusions about this writing placement test research sample require much further study, specific trends have emerged during the study.

An analysis of age, for instance, reveals that 69.9% of the three-reader students are under 30. More significant than that high percentage, however, is the fact that 76% of three-reader students who stopped attending RACC are under 25 and that as an age group, 82.7% of those under 25 either stopped attending RACC or never attended the college.

In addition, 44.6% of the three-reader students declared Business-related majors, nearly 2.4 times more than those in the second highest group, Liberal Arts. Moreover, Liberal Arts students, second in the list of declared majors for three-reader students, lead the percentages of withdrawing students; 72.2% of the Liberal Arts majors stopped attending RACC by the end of the students' first academic year. Pre-Allied Health majors, on the other hand, represent the only students for whom the number of those still attending RACC exceeds those in this study who left the college.

Reading scores reinforce in-house studies which emphasize the importance of a 12.0 reading level to improve the chances of success for all students. Among three-reader students who failed Composition, 62.5% scored below 12.0 in vocabulary and 50% earned below 12.0 in Comprehension on the Nelson-Denny Test. Overall, 62.5% of the three-reader students who failed Composition had below 12.0 Nelson-Denny reading totals.

Compiling average Nelson-Denny scores according to performance in Composition extends the importance of reading in writing success for three-reader students at RACC. Students earning C or better in Composition averaged 13.9 in comprehension; those scoring below C averaged 11.9 in comprehension. Similarly, students earning C or better in Basics of College Writing averaged 12.9 in comprehension while those who scored below C also averaged 11.9.

77.4% of the three-reader students in this research sample completed a writing course during their first term. More significantly, only 9.5% of those who did not attempt a writing course by the end of their first academic year still attend RACC.

Taking a writing class is obviously important for RACC students. Equally significant in this study is the grade earned in the writing class. 59.0% of the three-reader students placed in Composition and 61.4% of the three-reader students placed in Basics of College Writing scored C or better. Reversing the emphasis of the statistics shows that 77.3% of those attempting a writing class (either Composition or Basics of College Writing) and still attending RACC scored C or better. On the other hand, 53.1% of those attempting writing and no longer attending RACC scored below C in the writing class.

Failing a writing course for these three-reader students is not so significant as not retaking the failed course. 75.0% of those who failed writing and still attend RACC retook the failed class. Moreover, 92.3% of the three-reader students who failed writing and did not retake it no longer attend RACC.

Credits carried during the term of the first writing class average 8.0 for Composition-level students and 6.5 for developmental-level students. Overall, 88.9% of the students who completed their first writing class while taking one other course passed the writing class. 62.5% of students carrying two or more courses with their first writing class also passed the writing course.

Earning 2.0 or better (on a 4.0 scale) during the term in which they attempted their first writing class were 68.1% of the Composition students and 61.2% of the Basics of College Writing students. Significantly, 47.4% of the three-reader students falling below 2.0 during the term of their first writing course left the college at the end of that term. 21.1% of those scoring below 2.0 during the term in which they completed their first writing class left the college one term later.

Although the small research sample makes the following high statistics potentially unreliable, 50.0% of the Composition students and 71.0% of the Basics of College Writing students attempted a second writing class. Students in that small sample proved 1.6 times more likely to continue attending RACC than those who did not complete a second writing class.

Overall, Composition and developmental level students in this study average three RACC terms. The difference in average grade point average between the writing levels is 0.07, with a 2.09 cumulative g.p.a. for Composition-level students and a 2.16 for developmental-level students. Examining the same categories according to attendance, however, reveals significant differences. Still-attending students (they were still attending at the beginning of the 1985-86 School Year) already average 2.8 terms more than three-reader students who stopped attending. In addition, still-attending students currently average 0.47 points higher than those who stopped attending and have completed 2.8 times more credits than three-reader students who left RACC.

11. General Conclusions and Recommendations

The profile of three-reader students provides potentially useful information for advisors and counselors as well as for college personnel responsible for retention.

Most importantly, three-reader students must be identified for academic advisors and counselors. One way is to include a separate writing placement designation for borderline students. (The final course recommendation, Composition or Basics of College Writing, is the only writing placement test information currently listed in students' advisement records.) Identifying three-reader students, especially those placed in Composition, is the first step in helping students to select the

appropriate combination of credits, courses, and support services to maximize their academic success at RACC.

Encouraging three-reader placement test students to enroll in the required first writing class is also important. Only 9.5% of the borderline students who did not complete a writing class during their first academic year still attend the college. Also important during the initial terms is placing three-reader students who score below 12.0 on the Nelson Denny Test into appropriate reading classes.

The monitoring of these students must continue beyond their initial terms in order to improve their retention beyond one academic year. Both enrolling in a second writing class and retaking a failed writing course statistically increase three-reader students' chances for academic success. Equally significant, is encouraging those who fall below 2.0 in a term to reduce their per-term course load to two classes in order statistically to improve their odds of passing future RACC classes. (Only 16.9% of those who scored below 2.0 in a single term still attend the college. Completing two terms below 2.0 resulted in almost 100% withdrawal from the college by students in this study.)

In addition to providing advisement information, the three-reader profile identifies areas of potential concern for college personnel involved in recruitment and retention activities. For instance, factors contributing to college withdrawal by those under age 25 require investigation. Similarly necessary is determining reasons for lower retention rates among Liberal Arts and Business majors than among Pre-Allied Health majors. One positive reason may be that RACC courses quickly meet the transfer and/or career needs of those in Liberal Arts and Business programs. A negative reason for the high attrition rates in these two areas, however, may be a lack of academic identity and advisor

monitoring for students in these programs. The diverse curricula of the Liberal Arts majors and the large number of Business majors may contribute to the academic anonymity of these groups. The three-reader students in Pre-Allied Health, on the other hand, have both career-group identity and specific academic advising, which supply the support and direction especially necessary for those whose writing skills fall between course levels.

12. Recommendations for Further Research

Identifying features of three-reader students and proposing theories for specific trends is only the beginning of the investigation. To determine the validity of these findings and to ascertain their overall relevance requires more extensive research. Among the recommendations for further research are the following:

1. Enlarge the research sample to include three-reader students in 1984-1985 Academic Year.

2. Enlarge the research sample to include all placement test student from the 1983-1984 School Year to compare data for three-reader students with data for two-reader students.

3. Interview instructors of three-reader students from the 1983-1984 School Year to determine non-numerical factors related to the performance, success, and attendance of these students.

4. Complete an item analysis of writing placement tests representing this research sample in order to identify any textual, stylistic, or other test-specific features that predict average success in RACC writing classes.

5. Establish placement test evaluation procedures that minimize large numbers of three-reader essays.

6. Evaluate data according to identified part-time and full-time students.

7. Compile follow-up statistics for three-reader still-attending students in this study to compare final data on these individuals with current data.

Even without further research, the profile of three-reader students emphasizes the balance that must exist among placement test results, academic advisement, and college retention efforts in order to increase students' academic success. Improving the validity of placement measurement, educating advisors about factors that predict success for borderline writing students, and implementing the research findings of RACC personnel will not only increase students' performance possibilities but also enhance retention efforts of the college.

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Appendix A: Instruction Sheets

Introductory Instructions--Set 1 of Placement Test Evaluations

June 12, 1985

Dear Division Member:

As part of my Title III project, I wish to investigate various aspects of the placement test process. You are part of that process. During the coming term I shall contact you to discuss several topics related to the writing sample evaluation system. Before that time, however, I wish to set up two placement grading simulations.

The accompanying packet is part of that simulation. Please do not let its size overwhelm you. The activities will take you approximately 70 minutes. You will be performing various tasks--ranking, scoring, checking criteria, etc.--as you move through your testing packet; therefore, please read specific directions carefully. Moreover, if there is a segment that you choose not to complete or to which you wish to respond in a different manner, feel free to make those decisions. I ask only that you work independently and that you respond honestly.

You will perform this first placement grading simulation during today's scheduled open registration. (I will cover your registration duties, one by one, until everyone has returned from completing the testing packet.

You will also receive a check for $10.00 to thank you for your time. It will be available when you return your responses.

One final request: please use the color-coded pen in your testing packet to make your responses.

Sincerely,

Specific Task Instructions--Set 1 of Placement Test Evaluations

Sample Evaluation Directions: Ranking

Read through each of the six attached writing samples.

Once you have read each essay, establish a ranking order for the, determining which essay you consider to be the best; which, the next best; and so on.

Rank each of the writing samples on the lone provided, using 6 for the essay which you consider the best and moving down to 1 for the essay you consider to the the worst of the set.

Specific Task Instructions--Set 1 of Placement Test Evaluations

Sample Evaluation Directions: Scoring

This packet contains ten placement essays.

After you have finished reading each writing sample, check the appropriate line, HU 121 for composition level placement of HU 101 for developmental level placement.

Do not agonize over any paper. Read quickly and at a steady pace.

In addition, DO NOT use question marks, divided scores, or any other middle of the road designations.

If you wish to make a comment about any essay or to write a note on any paper, that is permitted.

This packet has been randomly selected; therefore, do not anticipate any specific sampling of the two placement categories (HU 121 and HU 101).

Introductory Instructions--Set 2 of Placement Test Evaluations

August 14, 1985

Dear Humanities Division Member:

Part 2 of the placement test evaluation has begun and is enclosed with this letter. You will discover the following items in the packet of papers I have attached:

1. Approximately 50 placement writing samples (Some may look familiar, but please do not try to guess what score you assigned the last time. Read the paper anew.)
2. Several essay response sheets. (Because several of you objected to the checklist which I provided on the last set or writing samples, I have included the blank response sheets on which you can list evaluation criteria for specific essays.)
3. An interview appointment sheet.
4. A check
5. A return envelope. (Those who are teaching Summer session have not received this last item.)

I shall place these packets in the mail on August 6. I'd like you to place them in the return mail by August 14 or in my RACC mailbox by August 15. If this deadline is inconvenient for you, please call. My new home phone number is 777-----.

Sincerely,

Specific Task Instructions--Set 2 of Placement Evaluations

Sample Evaluation Directions: Scoring

This packet contains ten placement essays.

After you have finished reading each writing sample, check the appropriate line, HU 121 for composition level placement or HU 101 for developmental level placement.

Do not labor over any paper.

In addition, DO NOT use question marks, divided scores, or any other middle-of-the-road designation.

If you wish to make a comment about a paper, that's okay. However, don't feel obliged to do anything except check the appropriate line.

Please use the color-coded pen to make your placement determinations.

Remember that these samples are randomly arranged; therefore, you should not expect any specific division of placement levels in this set.

Appendix B: Checklists for Placement Criteria

If your placement determination was 121, answer the following:

Which THREE of the following criteria (or fill in three of your own) were most significant in your determination of the 121 placement? Please choose only THREE and base your answers SPECIFICALLY on the essay you have just evaluated.

_____	direct answer to question	_____	pronoun usage
_____	statement of thesis	_____	subject-verb agreement
_____	organization	_____	parallel structure
_____	rhetorical strategy	_____	idiomatic usage
_____	noteworthy ideas	_____	punctuation
_____	supporting materials	_____	use of modifiers
_____	tone and attitude	_____	level of diction
_____	transitions	_____	range of vocabulary
_____	sentence variety	_____	spelling
_____	sentence logic	_____	precision of diction
_____	other _____ (specify)	_____	essay length
	_____ (specify)		

Categories listed on this sheet are based on "significant predictors" identified by Breland and Jones (1984) in "Perceptions of Writing Skills."

If your placement determination was 101/CEC, answer the following:

Which THREE of the following categories (or fill in three of your own) were most significant in your determination of 101/CEC placement? Please choose only THREE and base your answers SPECIFICALLY on the essay you have just evaluated.

____ did not answer the question	_____ pronoun inconsistency/ ambiguity
____ no statement of thesis	_____ subject-verb agreement errors
____ weak organizational pattern	_____ incorrect parallel structure
_____ inappropriate rhetorical strategy	_____ punctuation errors
_____ lack of supporting materials	_____ minimal/incorrect use of modifiers
_____ lack of clear transitional signals between sentences and paragraphs	_____ lack of precise diction
_____ minimal variety of types and lengths of sentences	_____ immature level of diction
_____ problems with sentence logic	_____ spelling errors
_____ other _____ (specify)	_____ insufficient essay length

Categories listed on this sheet are based on the "significant predictors" identified by Breland and Jones (1984) in "Perceptions of Writing Skills."

STOP!STOP!STOP!STOP!STOP!STOP!STOP!STOP!STOP!STOP!STOP!STOP!STOP!

For the last essay:

1. Review your placement determination (either HU 121 or HU 101).

2. Indicate two (or more) specific reasons for your choice

   You may want to note specific qualities that the essay has/lacks, or you may wish to direct me to specific lines in the placement test that support your HU 121 or HU 101 evaluation.

   You do not have to write in complete sentences; grades on your responses will be assigned on the basis of content and clarity.

Your Response

Appendix C: Interview Questions

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

For a Composition (HU 121) paper:

1. Do you look for certain items?
2. What are they?
3. Do certain items attract you?
4. What are they?
5. Is there a certain combination of elements that automatically suggests placement in 121?

For a Developmental (HU 101) paper:

1. Do you look for certain items?
2. What are they?
3. Do certain items serve as red flags?
4. What are they?
5. Is there a certain combination of elements that automatically suggests placement in 101?
6. In what ways is your evaluation of a 101 paper different from your evaluation of a 121 paper?
7. In what ways is your evaluation of a 101 paper the same as that for a 121 paper?

For a Borderline paper:

1. Is there a combination of elements that you find difficult to place?
2. Can you explain?
3. What do you look for when trying to decide on the placement of a borderline paper?
4. Are there any other considerations which you make when determining placement of borderline papers?

For All Essays:

1. Are there common expectations/performances in placement papers?
2. What are they?
3. Are there certain kinds of elements which you feel justified in overlooking?
4. Are there any topics which you find difficult to handle?
5. What are they?
6. Why are they difficult?
7. Are there suggestions for types of topics to include?
8. What are they?
9. Do you have suggestions for kinds of topics to avoid?
10. What are they?
11. Are there any kinds of responses which you find difficult to evaluate?
12. What are they?
13. Why are they difficult?
14. Can you suggest ways that we can eliminate these kinds of responses?
15. Are there certain combinations of elements that you feel confident about placing?

16. What are these elements?
17. Why do you feel confident about them?
18. Are there certain elements (positive of negative) to which you're especially sensitive?
19. What are these elements?
20. How do you handle these elements when you meet them in a placement sample?

For Writing overall:

1. What do you think should be skills that a student entering composition should possess?
2. As a composition instructor, what elements are most important to you?

Grading Ritual

1. Do you have a specific procedure when evaluating a placement writing sample?
2. Do you have a location at which you prefer to evaluate placement essays?
3. What specific numbers of tests do you prefer to read at one session?
4. Can you explain your response?
5. Can you evaluate placement essays when other people are nearby?
6. Do you have any requirements in order to be able to respond to essays when people are in the same room with you?
7. Do you prefer one reading order (first, second, third) over any others?
8. Can you explain the reason for your preference?

Definition of Terms

1. What do you look for in sentence combining?
2. What do you look for in sentence crafting?
3. What does the term "continuity" mean to you?
4. What does the word "cohesiveness" mean to you?
5. Explain what "development" means to you?
6. Explain what you mean by "tone."
7. What do you mean by writing "flair?"
8. What is high-density writing?
9. What do you mean by "coherence?"
10. What do you mean by "surface errors?"
11. What do you mean by "sentence errors?"
12. What would you classify as a syntax error?
13. What do you mean by _____: (Fill in any term used by the individual during the interview.)

Ranking

1. Can you list the five most important elements to you in evaluating a placement test?
2. Are these elements the same for 101 and a 121 essay?
3. If not, how are they different?
4. Can you rank these five elements?

In Summary:

1. What concerns you the most when evaluating a placement test?
2. What is the most positive element of evaluating a placement test?
3. What changes would you like to see in the evaluation procedure?
4. Are there suggestions you can make to improve the reliability of what you do?
5. is there a topic that you'd like to discuss?
6. Is there something about my questions or "testing" that you'd like to change? to know about?
7. Is there information about your rating that you'd like to have?

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